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1920

# VANITAS

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PAUL ELDRIDGE



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# VANITAS

BY  
PAUL ELDRIDGE



BOSTON  
THE STRATFORD CO., *Publishers*  
1920

PS3509  
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The STRATFORD CO., Publishers  
Boston, Mass.

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The Alpine Press, Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

JUN -1 1920

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no 1

## VANITAS

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*À Sylvia, — vanité exquise*

One can sing of beautiful things,  
For beautiful things are not perfect;  
One cannot sing of Beauty herself,  
For Beauty and Perfection are One. . . .  
How, then, shall I sing of my Love?





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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*Thanks are due to the editors of the various magazines and newspapers for permission to reprint in this volume many of the poems previously published by them.*





## My Thoughts

My thoughts are little clowns,  
Irreverent and merry,  
That stick their tongues  
To Sun and Moon,  
And laugh at Men and Gods.

My thoughts are silver flutes,  
Playing strange romanzas  
In my ears,  
That make me dream  
And weep.

My thoughts are shaven monks  
That count their rosaries  
Listlessly  
Forever.

My thoughts are flocks of blackbirds  
That turn in endless circles,  
And caw — and caw.

My thoughts are tiny Jovelets  
In atom skies,

## V A N I T A S

Ruling cosmos  
For a Breath's  
Eternity.

My thoughts are flakes of snow  
That fall and fall,  
And vanish —  
Or turn to mud.

My thoughts are timoróus mice  
Gnawing at Illusions,  
Afraid of Truth,  
The grey-eyed Cat.

My thoughts are blue-rimmed lakes,  
And Earth and Sky,  
Voluptuous women  
Come bathing there.

My thoughts are tremulous echoes  
Of far-off drums  
The stars are beating on  
With silver rays.

My thoughts are red hyenas  
That dig within my heart  
And munch its memories,  
And laugh.

## V A N I T A S

My thoughts are cemeteries  
Where wander nightly  
White-sheeted ghosts  
That wail and moan.

My thoughts —  
How well for me,  
They are so deeply hidden  
In the circus of my brain!

# V A N I T A S

## I Dream

Life gallops by like a mad horse —  
But I sit at the window and dream —  
I dream of still marble oceans like giant  
    sarcophagi  
Bordered with tall alabaster trees whose ebony  
    shadows  
Cut fantastic caves across their bosoms.

Life howls like a wild hurricane —  
But I sit at the window and dream —  
I dream of vast solitary skies, like sapphire  
    deserts,  
Where dead black moons and dead black stars,  
    blind sphinxes,  
Squat in echoless eternity.

Life sings like a drunken bird,  
But I sit at the window and dream —  
I dream of her dead eyes. . . .



## V A N I T A S

### Invitation to a Funeral

Tomorrow I bury my dead hopes.  
Tomorrow at high noon,  
When all things are flushed with life,  
I shall bury them.  
I have stretched them all out,  
Side by side,  
Delicate, exquisite hopes.  
I have caressed them for the last time.  
They lie so still and white,—  
They seem asleep,  
Dreaming of quiet lakes,  
And thin long shadows of trees. . . .  
Tomorrow I shall dig a very deep grave  
Within my heart,  
And bury my dead hopes,  
Gently, tenderly.  
I shall sing a requiem for them,  
Low and sad,  
Like the dream of a desolate wind.  
I shall throw heavy shovels  
Of mud and pebbles  
Upon them,

## V A N I T A S

And fill their grave  
To the brim.  
I shall smoothen it  
With the back of my shovel. . . .  
I shall plant tall cypresses.  
Sleepy owls shall perch upon them.  
Passing winds shall pout their thin white lips  
Against their leaves,  
And whistle,  
The endless song of endless misery. . . .

My friends and relatives —  
Particularly those who killed my dreams —  
Are cordially invited  
To attend the funeral services.  
They need not drag with them  
The awful burden of a tear.

## The Forgetful Owls

Nightly,  
Silence summons to herself  
The Owls of the world,  
And whispers in their feathered ears  
The Truth of Things,  
Which they promise  
To repeat to Man  
When he wakes.  
But the Sun,  
The hater of Truth,  
Dazzles their round eyes,  
And they fall asleep,  
And dream —  
And forget. . . .  
And Man seeks —  
Seeks in vain  
What only Silence  
And the Owls know. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### The Daisy Speaks

What am I?  
The poets have named me  
A star, and a sun, and a ripple  
Of a silver and golden sea,  
And the amorous virgin  
Has kissed and caressed me,  
And asked of my petals  
Her fate;  
The rain has pattered on me  
With the rhythm  
Of quicksilver sticks  
On a drum,  
And the moon,  
An evening or two ago,  
Whitened and glared me so,  
I seemed a thin and shivering ghost!

The Earth is whispering softly:  
This day,  
When shadows shall drop  
On her bosom,  
The granite-made hoof

## V A N I T A S

Of the mountainous cow  
Shall fall  
With the weight of a world  
On me, and render me  
Mud!

But now — A windlet is sporting with me,  
And shakes me and shakes me,  
Like a silent and golden tongue  
Of an unseen bell!

. . . . .  
What am I?

## V A N I T A S

### Faces and Souls

Faces, faces, faces . . .  
An orgie dance of faces,  
An insane carnival of faces . . .  
Mouths and cheeks and noses,  
And a crumbled Heaven of eyes,—  
Eyes that shine and dim,  
Like endless summer-fields  
Of twinkling fireflies  
Upon some moonless night—  
Eyes that seek and grieve,  
And laugh and weep,  
And stare at last  
Like oval chips  
Of frozen glass . . .  
Faces.  
And beneath them  
Souls—  
Small fearing souls,  
Thin, hungry souls,  
Phantom sphinxes,  
Obscene and cynical—  
Souls yearning and sobbing,

## V A N I T A S

And dying . . .  
Souls that spew forever  
Like slimy crustacea,  
Stony masks of faces  
And skulk beneath them.  
Faces and souls —  
In a mad dance,  
In a wild carousel —  
Faces and souls,  
An infinite desert  
Of tombs and silences. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Time's Castanets

Tipsy with my sweetheart's kisses,  
I whispered in her mouth —  
“Dearest —  
Our wonder Love —  
Is like yonder star —  
Immortal — ”

Time,  
Hidden in a spider's web,  
Rattled castanets  
Of bones,  
And laughed. . . .

I know not  
What my sweetheart heard —  
My whisper in her mouth —  
Or Time's castanets —

But she wept —



## V A N I T A S

### My Days Pass Me By

My days pass me by —  
This one, on tiptoes,  
Like a forbidden hope —  
This — a clumsy villager  
Stamping wooden shoes  
Against curbstones —  
These — heavy and slow,  
Despaired insomnia  
Staring out of windows  
Counting stars —  
This — thin and shapeless,  
A bit of grayish cloud,  
That little winds puff on —  
These — bent with secrets and with cares,  
Like hunchback women parading. . . .  
My days pass me by —  
Some weeping bitterly  
Into half-closed fists,  
Some wriggling bony fingers  
On their pointed noses. . . .  
My days pass me by —  
The long cortege of mourners  
At my funeral.

## V A N I T A S

### My Hopes

My hopes are gay-painted moths,  
Voluptuous clowns,  
Fluttering to delirious music —  
But the red-eyed flame —  
Whistles and laughs —  
Whistles and laughs. . . .

My hopes are merry birds  
That sing their rapture  
To the skies —  
But the cat —  
The taciturn Sphinx —  
Watches,  
And her eyes  
Glitter — glitter. . . .

My hopes are tiny starlets  
In the sand,  
Dancing cotillions  
To the sun —  
But the Night comes,

## V A N I T A S

And the winds blow,  
And the winds blow. . . .

My hopes — my hopes —  
My foolish little hopes. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### My Sweetheart Dreams

The boat glides very softly  
Like some melancholy swan,—  
My sweetheart tears slowly  
The petals of a rose,  
And dreams —  
Dreams of other loves than mine.

# VANITAS

## A Picture

Three old men smoking pipes,  
And playing dominoes —  
One remembers a dead wife,  
One thinks of a tune he used to  
    whistle,  
One has forgotten everything  
Save how to move correctly  
Black oblongs with white dots and  
    lines —  
Three old men smoking pipes,  
And playing dominoes. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Douleur

Why should my hopes  
Like yellow withered leaves  
Fall to the ground,  
And turn to mud, —  
While my regrets  
Must grow and blossom  
Like giant evergreens,  
And throw their dismal shadows  
Across my path?

# V A N I T A S

## Modesty

Let the vain bird  
Sing to all the winds  
His vulgar love —  
The love of butterfly  
Would wither, sorrowed,  
If the gentle roses  
Heard the flutter of his wings.

# VANITAS

## Frivolity Punished

The stars are frivolous tonight,  
Mocking the nakedness of trees —  
I shall punish them,  
I shall close my eyes,—  
They shall tumble like glass-beads  
Into the velvet-bag of Night!



# V A N I T A S

## Weariness

An ant,  
Tumbling into his cell,  
The last load  
Dropping out of his mouth.

# V A N I T A S

## Shadows

The shadows of mountains  
Fall lighter than a robin's feather  
Upon the Earth —  
But the shadows of my thoughts  
Fall heavy and limp  
Like leaden corpses  
Upon my heart.

# V A N I T A S

## Gloria Mundi

A drunkard sits upon the grass  
And sings, between the hiccoughs,  
A vapid song —  
Underneath him,  
In the mud and slime of worms  
Rots Maestro's throat,  
The greatest tenor of his age.

## V A N I T A S

### You Pass Me On

You pass me on —

You go your little way, to laugh your little  
laugh, to shed your little tear — alone!

You pass me on —

Though I am your brother — flesh and blood  
and soul.

To the dog you meet upon the road, you whistle,  
and smile if he follows —

But I am as a stone that must be shoved aside to  
make a passageway —

I — your brother!

You have your little home, with closed shutters,  
You have your little nation, stuck upon a flag-  
pole,

You have your little church with special hymns,  
your little god that blesses only you —

And that's your life.

And I am as a hated stranger to you —

You would cheat me, you would mock me,

You would starve me — for your little self!

## V A N I T A S

And yet I am your brother!  
At your side I walk the stony earth,  
And the blood of your weary feet mingles with  
mine!

I am your brother —  
Born with the morning hour, and dead with the  
night!  
I am your brother for the space of a single day,  
And yet you spurn me!

You pass me on —  
As though your hand could heal the deep  
wounds it makes,  
As though eternity were yours to be forgiven in!  
You pass me on —  
And go to laugh your little laugh, to shed your  
little tear — alone!

## V A N I T A S

### You Were So Pure

You were so pure,  
So exquisite,  
I feared to touch  
Your little hand,  
I feared to bend upon my knee,  
And swear eternal passion.  
You were so tender,  
So like the unblown bud  
Of a fragile rose,  
I dared not whisper,  
"I love you,"  
That like some coarse wind  
I might not tear  
The delicate petals.  
And so I walked away,  
And wept my sorrow  
Into my hands.

And now you're married —  
You gave a dowry,  
And bargained cleverly  
To be a wife.

## V A N I T A S

I saw you hang upon his arm,  
And look with amorous desire  
Into his eyes,—  
While he was yawning. . . .  
And so I walked away,  
And laughed my sorrow  
Into my hands.

## V A N I T A S

### The Bachelor

One evening in his youth  
As the waters were a-dancing  
To the music of the moon,  
He met a fairy,  
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,  
Who whispered playfully,  
“I love you!”  
And vanished.  
He has spent his life  
In search of her.  
He has asked a thousand girls,  
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,—  
“Do you remember,  
One evening long ago,  
As the waters were a-dancing  
To the music of the moon,  
You whispered,—”

He's fifty now,  
Gray and rheumatic,  
And rather petulant;



## V A N I T A S

But still he hopes,  
Some happy evening,  
When the waters are a-dancing  
To the music of the moon,  
He shall meet his fairy,  
Golden-eyed and golden-haired,  
Who will whisper playfully,  
"I love you!"

# V A N I T A S

## Success

He considered life  
A towering mansion,  
And Man's purpose  
To reach its height . . . .  
And so,  
He climbed,  
And climbed,  
And climbed,  
Until  
Bleeding and breathless  
He reached,  
At last,  
The rat-smelling  
Attic. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## The Black Cat

The Mice, .  
The Inhabitants of the Earth,  
The cosmic Cellar,  
Are gnawing clamorously,  
And disturb  
The sleeping of the Stars —  
The Ancient Guardian  
Swings his lantern — The Moon —  
As he descends  
The mouldy steps  
Of Infinity,—  
While the Black Cat  
Under his arm  
Meaws — meaws —

## V A N I T A S

### The Candle and the Sun

The sun raised his golden head  
Above the snow-bound parapets  
Of Eastern mountains,  
And smiled to the Earth below  
Still sleepy as himself.

The candle in my room,  
Near-sighted, squinted,  
And sputtered in anger,  
Until she lay  
In sullen globs  
Upon the floor.

“He’s come again, the Libertine,  
From the night’s wild revelry  
Among the oceans and the seas,  
The fickle courtesans.

He’s come again —  
To flatter with his myriad colors  
The silly Earth.

To turn the mud to gold  
And the wet grasses  
To diadems of pearls.

He’s come again —  
And I, the truth of things,

## V A N I T A S

The herald of reality,  
Shall be as blind  
As some weary owl  
Hidden in forgotten ruins,  
And melt within the desert air  
From sheerest melancholy!  
Alas, such world. . . .  
Where Falsehood sits with gods in Heaven,  
Making merriment,  
While Truth,  
Imprisoned in a fist of brass,  
Must die in the orgie dances  
Of mad colors!"

A sudden breath of wind,  
The master mocker,  
Blew,—  
A slender stream of smoke  
Arose, and filled the air  
With the acrid smell  
Of heavy tallow-wick. . . .

The Sun,  
Now wide awake,  
Danced gaily  
On the snow-bound parapets  
With golden feet. . . .

## VANITAS

### Dying

The sun is falling  
Behind the Seas,  
Some blades of grass  
Shrink and curve;  
A rose is dangling  
Against its stalk,  
Like a head that hurts.  
A robin's notes  
Have vanished  
With the winds;  
Some footsteps  
Turn the corner,  
And a girl stands and weeps —  
In a coffin  
Something lies outstretched,  
And candles burn. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### The Sun, the Poet, and the Cow

The Sun was sinking  
In gorgeous nonchalance —  
A god contented,  
Assured of endless life.

In ecstasy the Poet  
Stretched forth his arms,  
And improvised in fervent verse  
A hymn of joy and reverence,  
And knelt  
And prayed. . . .

The Cow, reclining on the grass  
A gracious queen,  
Upraised her head  
And blandly looked  
And thought:  
“How youthful is the race of man,  
And garrulous!  
Some day they'll learn  
That nothing is or matters

## V A N I T A S

Save to chew the cud  
In careless elegance,  
And sleep. . . .”

The Poet prayed on and on . . .  
The Cow chewed on and on . . .  
The Sun was sinking  
In gorgeous nonchalance. . . .



## V A N I T A S

### The Loaded Dice

I've lost —  
In spite of pains and labors,  
And eighty years of life,  
In spite of all applause,  
And busts and statues,  
I'm but a mass of bones  
Within an oblong box,  
And both to be dissolved together,  
And kneaded into mud,  
The muffled drum of the ages' rain,  
A pathway for the lonesome cows  
For many generations —  
I've lost, 'tis true,  
But then —  
I played with God —  
And now I understand —  
His dice are always loaded!

## V A N I T A S

### You and He

You are a golden dream  
Walking through muddy streets,  
Raising your white silk dress,  
Daintily.

He is a clumsy boar  
Walking through a golden dream,  
Shaking stupidly  
The sun-dipped particles  
From his paws.

# V A N I T A S

## Divine Alms

In the Winter,  
The trees are naked mendicants  
Lifting crooked hands  
In supplication.

The gods are bountiful—  
They throw upon them  
Profusely,—  
Sleet and snow.

# VANITAS

## Winter-Dreams

The sleepy Earth,  
Draws over her face,  
The soft, white quilt,  
And dreams —  
Blue and yellow daisies.

## V A N I T A S

### The Lakelet Meditates

I am the eternal Heavens,  
And the stars and the sun lie upon me  
More softly than the sudden dipping  
Of a swallow's wing —  
And above, in Infinite Space,  
An azure toy-mirror  
Reflects me forever. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### Absence

When you are away, my love,  
The evil spirits of Things,  
Creep out like gray mice  
And make strange noises,  
Frightening me.

## V A N I T A S

### O Diamond, Beautiful and Rare!

O diamond, beautiful and rare,  
Shining on my lady fair,  
As a mimic sun on earth,  
How can you know what gave you birth,—  
The eyes blinded for your sheen,  
The whetted hearts to make you keen,  
Virgins' love to build you white,  
Children's laughs to lend delight,—  
Within your tiny measured span,  
Lies a hecatomb of man!

O diamond, beautiful and rare,  
Shining on my lady fair,  
Could you but guess what gave you life,  
The blood, the agony, the strife,  
You would in utter pain and shame  
Burn your heart within your flame,  
And fall black ashes on the floor,  
Avenger of the countless poor!

## V A N I T A S

### Solitude

The tides rise and fall,  
Rise and fall,  
Rocking all things on their soft breasts,  
Save me —  
A silver-fingered wave  
Has dashed me on the shore,  
And left me  
The sport of sands —  
Alas,—what matters a shell  
To tides that rise and fall,  
Rise and fall.



## V A N I T A S

### Subject for a Farce

Night —

An old woman sitting at the window —

Dreaming . . .

Suddenly,

Softly,

Her name is called —

“Florence — Florence — Florence!”

She shivers —

Rises —

Bends out —

A neighbor’s window opens,

A gentle voice whispers —

“All right, dearest—come up—I am alone” . . .

An old woman standing at the window,

Dreaming. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### The Singer

Daily, when the wives of men are busy,  
And rub their pots and clatter dishes,  
And scold and teach their little children,  
She comes into our yard and sings to us —  
A thin, uncertain voice that breaks  
And re-begins, and breaks again,  
She sings to us  
Of lads and lasses kissing,  
Of flowers, trees and eternal pledges,  
Of sun, and stars, and the roguish moons,  
Romances that mingle daily  
With the noises of pots and dishes,  
And the scolding of the little children.  
She sings to us —  
The aged hag,  
That smells of whiskey and of garlic,  
Hungered like some mangy dog,  
That prowls in the garbage cans,  
Swollen-eyed, toothless,  
Hideous in her piteous look —  
The ultimate dreg of human misery.  
She sings to us.

## V A N I T A S

I always throw a coin,  
Which rings with jubilance upon the asphalt  
    floor,  
And watch her rush to get it,  
I feel so like some tiny godlet  
Who from a tiny heaven  
Showers blessings on the earth!

# V A N I T A S

## Man and Superman

Who is the Superman?  
What mighty giant  
Unmoved and solitary,  
Laughing as the gods can laugh  
In irony  
At the infinite circus of stars,  
That dance and fall and crumble,  
And learning the total purport  
In the melancholy music  
Of the lonesome winds?

Who is the Superman?  
I know him not!  
He has not wept with me,  
And his blood in agony  
Has not mingled  
With mine!  
He has not stooped  
In awe and utter ignorance  
Over blades of grass,  
Or forsaken shells  
Upon the shores.

## V A N I T A S

Has he trembled and shivered  
With my fears?  
Has he shouted to dissolving clouds  
His hopes and his despair?  
Was he born of pain,  
And shall he die,  
As I must die,  
In anguish?

Who is the Superman?  
I know him not!

I know but Man —  
The weak, the fool, the clown,  
My enemy, my brother!

# V A N I T A S

## My Heart

My heart is a forest asleep  
With ghosts of desires and dreams  
Moaning their sorrowful tales  
To the nodding leaves.

My heart is a sensitive drum  
And the hours, master musicians  
Beat their pleasures and pains.

My heart is a diligent horse  
That drags his cart-load of blood  
In stupid submission —

Alas! he will grow weary—and fall!

## V A N I T A S

### My Ambition

I have but one ambition —  
To be a red cloud,  
And hang a summer's night  
Upon the moon's chin,  
Like the unkempt beard  
Of a white-headed goat,  
And make the gods laugh,  
And the one-eyed stars dance,  
And the earth profound and scholarly,  
Dispute and theorize . . .

Alas, my indolence. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### I Am the Rebel

I am the rebel!

Not he who fights against a state, a king, a word,  
Not he who accepts himself, but refuses the  
things of man,

Who says, "Change this — or this — and all is  
well!"

I am the rebel against myself,  
Against the fates that bore me, against the gods  
That mocking make me laugh or weep.

I hate the masters,

I hate the forces that play with me

As plays a little boy

With card-board marionettes!

The tiny wind holds sport, and drives me on,

The threaded ray a thousand years a-distant

Makes merry over my eyes, and orders

"This shall be black for you, and this white!"

The senseless stone commands my foot,

The silly rain strikes my face as blindly as the  
earth,—

Nay, I am not even a favorite among the toys  
That Nature makes to while away eternity!



## V A N I T A S

I am the rebel —

I hate life with her caprices and follies and  
tortures,

I hate death — the reward of the fool,

I hate the creator, blind and deaf and merciless,

I hate myself, the product of a moment's game,

That willed it,—“This shall you be —

This body, these nerves, this blood,

And these infinite traits and inheritances!”

I would be beyond myself, a law omnipotent,

A conscious god, master of all fates and forces!

I am the rebel —

Blind and bound and powerless —

Nailed to the cross, I wriggle still!

Though it be my own self I torture,

Though my fists strike back against my chest,

I will not accept — I will not bow —

Vanquished I disobey,

Vanquished I fight and die

THE REBEL!

## V A N I T A S

### Resist All Evil

“Resist not evil!”

How well indeed for scoundrels!

Slaves, your backs shall bend beneath their whip  
in joy,

And pray it grow the stronger and the sharper,  
To prove you worthy martyrs to a tyrant’s  
adage!

O glittering words!

O bitter warfare clad in peace!

O Satan-smile beneath a god’s decree!

“Resist not evil!”

That evil grow luxuriant,

And they who perpetrate it grow rich and  
strong,

Till changed shall be the dictum —

“Fools, you can’t resist the evil!”

I say — “Resist all evil!”

Your cheek unturned, strike back the blow,

The sword by sword shall answer!

“Resist all evil!”

Till evil hands fall leaden,

And evil hearts turn dust!

## V A N I T A S

### Youth

Each man's youth is a butterfly,  
Many-colored and gay,  
But mine was gray-colored  
And wise —  
He alighted in a corner  
To watch the others  
Dance about the flames,  
And burn —  
He folded his wings —  
And thought  
And moralized —  
Until he grew stiffened and dry,  
And his little dust  
Fell into the palms  
Of a passing wind.

## V A N I T A S

### Illusion

Life was a weary trudging  
Through sticky mud —  
I yearned for Death,  
The golden wind,  
The ceaseless merger of things —  
I thought I'd join the cosmos  
In her rapturous career,  
Dance cotillions with the stars,  
Kiss the red lips of moons,  
Scatter voluptuous perfumes  
From a rose's chalice. . . .

Are the cracks in this mouldy wood  
The dancing stars?  
Are these scarlet worms,  
Crawling, heavily,  
Like pregnant things  
Upon my teeth,  
The lips of moons?  
Is my coffin the cosmos,  
In her rapturous career?  
Is there a cosmos?  
Death is as futile as Life!

# V A N I T A S

## Winter

It is always Winter —  
For, have not my hopes,  
Which were blossoming trees,  
Dropped all their leaves —  
And has not the Wind,  
Melancholy Sexton,  
Wound about their shrivelled limbs,  
A white shroud?  
And in my heart,  
Does not a thin wolf  
Howl. . . ?

## V A N I T A S

### In Spring

The things I loved, died —  
I dug a grave,  
And buried them,  
Tenderly,  
Like wounded hearts,  
With all the pomp  
Of tears and verse.

“I’ll return in Spring,  
And gather daisies,  
The gentle souls  
Of the things I loved.”

In Spring —  
I returned —  
And found upon the grave  
Of the things I loved —  
A dead rat,  
And stout, angry flies  
Devouring him —

In Spring —

## V A N I T A S

### Snobbery

The artificial flower on the girl's hat  
Looks at the rose upon the stalk,  
And turns a dusty petal in disdain —  
“A vulgar plant, born in the mud,  
Too red, and spreading evil scents,  
Mistress of bees and butterflies,  
Inconstant, unashamed,  
Nodding to all the breezes . . .  
To-morrow she will wither. . . .”

# V A N I T A S

## Hot-House Dreams

I dream of scarlet Autumns  
And white-mouthed Winds  
Whose long, cool kisses  
Lull to endless sleep . . .  
Alas, it's always Summer!



# V A N I T A S

## The New Leaves

The new leaves upon the trees  
Deeply-colored and firm,  
Challenge the winds of the Earth:—  
“You shall not wither  
And scatter us,  
As you have withered and scattered  
The leaves of other Springs!”

· · · · ·  
The winds are very deaf!

# VANITAS

## Surviver

All the leaves have fallen —  
Save one —  
Swinging,  
Dizzy and scared,  
In the winds. . . .

# VANITAS

## Generation

This is the meaning of a generation —  
A pebble thrown into a placid lake —  
A sudden spray, like a tiny wavelet,  
Trembling circles in quick succession —  
          . . . . .  
A placid lake. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Death

Death is a white swan  
Sailing noiselessly —  
Leaving behind him  
Long, tremulous creases —  
The creases smoothen —  
He sails noiselessly on. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Memories

My memories were sharp-edged splinters  
Torturing me,—  
I plucked them out,  
And washed the blood away.

Have splinters roots,  
That grow,  
And blossom,—  
Rancorous evergreens?

## V A N I T A S

### The Saintly Dog

My lady's dog is always leashed —  
A perfect dog —  
A sinless dog —  
When he is dead —  
His soul shall enter Canine Eden,  
Where he will utter ceaselessly  
Echo-barks,  
And sniff forever  
Shadow females,—  
A joy eternal to his God.

## V A N I T A S

### The World Is Ill

The world is ill —  
And the Rain falls softly,  
Softly,  
Like gentle nurses on tip-toes.

# V A N I T A S

## Flirtation

You are a dainty Birdlet  
Swinging giddily  
On the frailest twig —  
I am a gray-eyed Tom-Cat  
Watching —  
Alas! You never fall. . . .



# V A N I T A S

## Old Age

The Rock pleads ceaselessly,—

“Listen!

Listen!

I was not always a rock —

I too —”

But the waves laugh

And splash him

With their foam.

# V A N I T A S

## The Wind and the Leaves

The wind sleeps lazily  
Among the leaves —  
The wind shall laugh  
In his dream —  
The leaves shall shiver,  
And fall. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Prudence

I loved my days dearly,  
And would not squander them.  
I am old and dying,—  
Where are my days?

# V A N I T A S

## A Shadow-Tree's Anxiety

I hope the little gold fish  
Swimming in my branches,  
Never see my other self,  
Heavy and coarse,  
Stuck upon my head,—  
Why must Shadows have Realities?

# V A N I T A S

## The Builders

All things I own  
Slowly turn to dust —  
When I get old  
I'll be the proud possessor  
Of a rising hill. . . .  
Is this how mighty gods  
Build skies and earths?

# VANITAS

## Ghosts

Dead leaves  
The wind rolls on,  
Scaring little birds  
That rocked on them.

# V A N I T A S

## My Years

My years fall softly,  
Softly,  
Like petals of a rose,  
And leave me,  
A barren, withered stalk  
That dangles in the winds.

# V A N I T A S

## Ennui

(A CLOUD'S COMPLAINT)

The feverish mouth of the Earth  
Breathes me forth,  
The silver toes of the Wind  
Toss me above the mountain peaks  
Where I roll and stiffen  
Into patches of gray and black —  
Then —  
I swell —  
And crack —  
And tumble  
In dizzy streams of warm water  
Back into the feverish mouth of the Earth —  
I have done this since things began —  
How long more is eternity?



# A New Mythology



# V A N I T A S

## God

God is a little girl  
Dressed in azure clouds, trimmed with rain-  
bows —  
A little girl, gay and mischievous,  
That likes to play with mud,  
And fashion little earths with little people,  
Little skies with little stars,  
Whole little planetary systems —  
And then throws them high — high —  
And shouts in merriment  
To watch them glisten as they rip Infinity,—  
And fall —  
And crumble —

## V A N I T A S

### The Moon and the Ocean

The Moon,  
A yellow tom-cat,  
Struts moodily  
Across the world  
And bends  
Her frail roof.

The ocean,  
Petulant neighbor,  
Nervous, unable to sleep,  
Scolds and clamors and swears,—  
Then weary,  
Spits upward,  
In jets of marble foam.

. . . . .  
The Moon,  
The old roué,  
Watches with desire  
The Earth below.  
The Ocean,  
Prudish maid,  
Hides her breasts,  
Feverishly,—  
But the winds, laughing,

## V A N I T A S

Blow off incessantly  
Her flimsy draperies.

. . . . .  
The Moon,  
A golden hoop,  
Rolls unsteadily  
Upon the rugged edges  
Of the shivering clouds.

The Ocean,  
Mischievous girl,  
Runs after —  
Her hands raised up  
To catch it,  
And shouts and laughs  
In utter merriment.

. . . . .  
The Moon  
The hoary recluse,  
Gazes calmly  
Across eternity,  
And meditates  
On Death.

The Ocean,  
The Earth's demagogue,  
Silver-tongued,

## V A N I T A S

Harangues the winds,  
Persuading them  
To blow across the Moon  
And blind him.

. . . . .  
The Moon,  
The painted mountebank  
Of the infinite circus,  
Grins and bows  
To his celestial audience.

The Ocean,  
A clumsy bear,  
Sways and dances  
To the bagpipes  
Of the merry winds.

. . . . .  
The Moon,  
A frozen Sun,  
Turning about the Earth  
In a senseless loop-the-loop.

. . . . .  
The Ocean —  
A salty mass  
Of steel-gray water  
Dashing forever  
Against her callous ribs.

# V A N I T A S

## Opinion

What Are the Stars?

THE STARS:

We are the Stars,  
Eternal and unquenchable!

THE LAKE:

The stars are silver fish  
Floating on their backs  
Like dead leaves.

THE FIREFLIES:

The stars are fireflies  
In neighboring fields.

THE WOLF:

The stars are shepherds' eyes  
Watching over flocks —  
But our feet  
Fall more softly  
Than shadows of lambs.

THE MOON:

The stars are bits of moons  
That crumbled.  
Alas! I too shall crumble  
Into stars. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### THE MOUNTAIN PEAK:

The stars are flakes of Snow  
Hardened against the clouds.  
In the Summer,  
They melt,  
And drop on me.

### THE OWL:

The stars are the gods of owls  
Revealing the hidden nests  
Of mice.  
Blessed be the stars!

### THE WIND:

The stars are lanterns  
Night, the sorceress, swings,  
As she seeks dead suns —  
At dawn,  
I blow them out.

### THE TREE:

The stars are unripe cherries,  
Torn and scattered  
By the merciless wind.  
Black clouds crush them  
Beneath their hoofs.

### DESERT:

The stars are the sands  
Of the Upper Desert.



## V A N I T A S

**ETERNITY:**

The stars are hours  
In the trembling hands  
Of Time.

**THE SUN:**

Stars?  
There are no stars!

# VANITAS

## Opinion

What Is the Sun?

THE SUN:

I am the Sun,  
Eternal and Unquenchable!

THE LAKE:

The sun is a thirsty deer  
Lapping my water,  
Greedily.

THE FIREFLIES:

Hail, Queen of Fireflies!  
When thou art shining,  
We hide, humble slaves,  
Within the grasses!

SPRING:

The sun is a bowl  
Of golden wine,  
Overspilling —  
Little birds drink of it,  
And grow mad.

WINTER:

The sun is a solitary gull  
Sailing on the crumbling crests  
Of snows.

## V A N I T A S

### THE CLOUDS:

The sun is a mighty thinker,  
And we are the shadows  
Of his thoughts.

### THE OWL:

The sun is a keen-edged sword  
That pierces the eyes.

### THE FIELDS:

The sun is a weary traveller  
Sleeping upon us.

### THE WOLF:

The sun is the terrible eye  
Of the master  
Watching his sheep —  
Wise wolves hide.

### ETERNITY:

The sun is a slow opening  
Of an eye —  
And then —  
Blindness.

### THE DESERT:

The sun is the mighty Dragon,  
Slayer of the god of Waters.

### THE STARS:

Sun?  
There is no sun!

# V A N I T A S

## Day and Night

An impish little god  
Has ripped the azure tent  
Of the cosmic circus,  
And peeps in  
And laughs —  
Flowers pout their lips  
And ask for kisses,  
Birds, vain troubadours  
Sing their amorous conceits  
Upon the flutes of breezes,  
And Man, the Cock of the World,  
Proclaims most pompously,  
“It’s Day!”

Soon,  
The solemn Master Clown  
Shall catch the little culprit,  
And pull him in,  
By the ear,  
All flushed with shame. . . .

The sentimental flowers  
Shall droop their heads,

## V A N I T A S

And mourn  
Love's inconstancies,  
The Birds, chilly and hoarse,  
Shall hide  
Among the shivering leaves,  
And Man,  
The Dray-Horse of the World,  
Worn and sleepy,  
Shall grumble  
To the Winds,  
"It's Night!"

## V A N I T A S

### Night

The Sun is dead —  
The Moon,  
The gloomy Sexton  
Has spread across the giant corpse  
A black drapery  
Of clouds,  
And lit  
About the rayless head  
White-flaming torches,  
And urged  
The garrulous Oceans  
To wail disconsolately  
And beat their hearts  
Against the rocks —  
Now,  
Like some pale anchorite,  
Who dead in faith  
Still counts the rosaries,  
He gazes at Infinity  
And counts the ribs  
Of sleeping leaves. . . .  
The cynical Winds  
Whistle and laugh. . . .

## V A N I T A S

### Gods and Men

I mused —  
The gods are cruel gods,  
And their murderous fingers  
Seek incessantly  
The throats of Things.  
But man is greater than the gods,  
And he can fashion  
Much nobler worlds.  
And from the clay of dreams  
I build me Sphere on Sphere  
Of beauty,  
And endless labyrinths  
Of Love. . . .  
At my feet,  
In painful disarray,  
Lay the fragments  
Of a rose,  
Which absent-mindedly  
I tore and pulled apart,  
While building worlds. . . .  
And then I understood —  
The gods are melancholy poets

## V A N I T A S

Dreaming — dreaming —  
Wondrous Worlds  
While absent-mindedly  
They blind a sun,  
And drop a star,  
And crumble little earths. . . .



# V A N I T A S

## Atlas

Atlas passed me by —  
Old and ragged and weary  
And bent so low,  
He seemed a giant dog,  
Whose wounded forepaws  
Dared not touch the ground.  
I know not what he saw —  
The cracked asphalt,  
That unwound itself,  
And spread away  
Like broken tides  
Of a silent sea,  
Or the ceaseless procession  
Of leathered feet,  
Or his own shadow,  
Black and flattened  
Like a soul oppressed —

Atlas passed me by —  
Carrying on his back  
A sack of coal —  
The heavy debris

## V A N I T A S

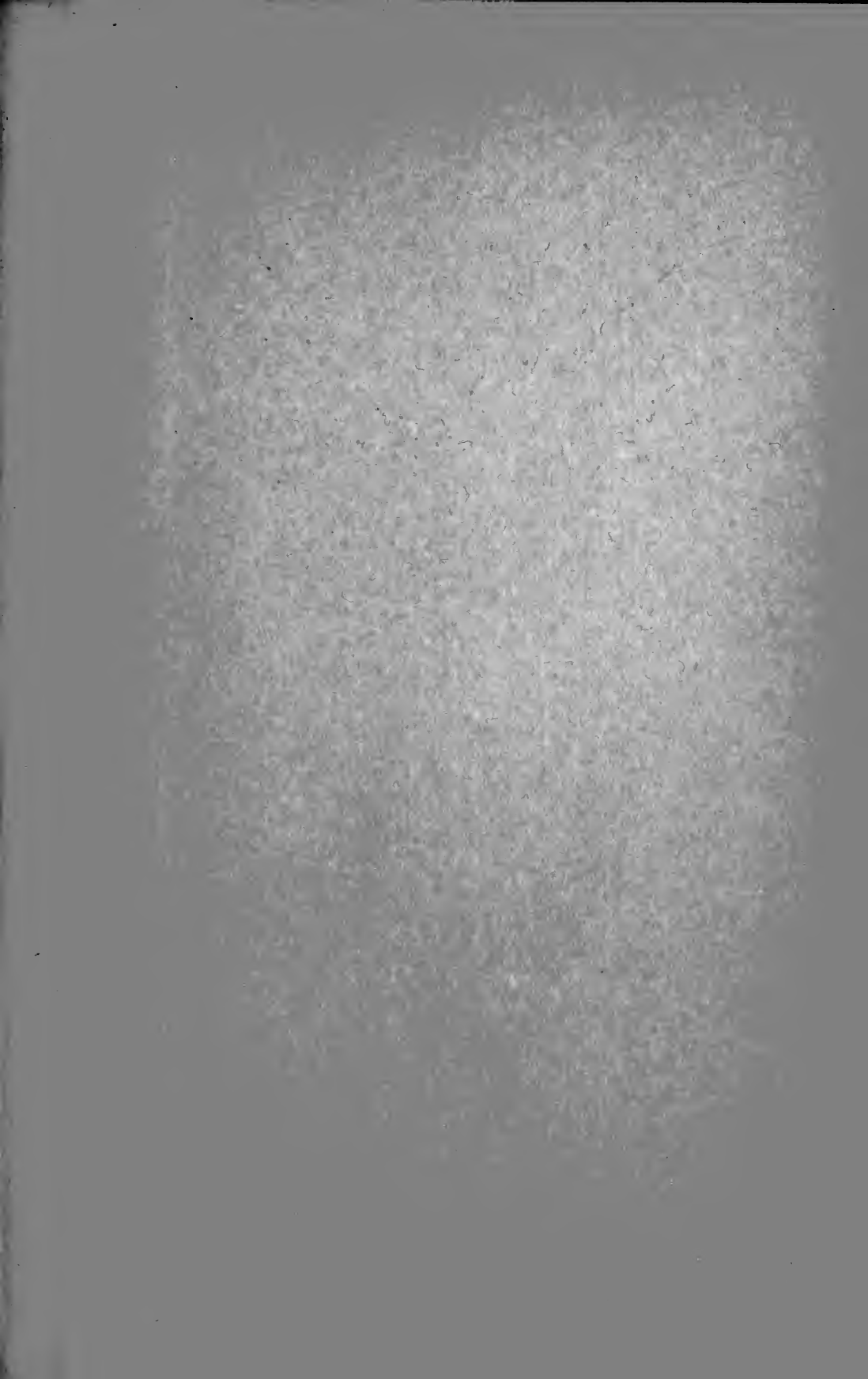
Of a burnt-up star —  
And at each step  
He grumbled and swore  
As of yore,  
When on his mighty nape  
The cosmos danced —  
While the eternal gods  
Now dwelling on the Earth  
Still feast and laugh  
As of yore. . . .

# V A N I T A S

## Snow

The Virgin Goddess of the Clouds,  
Opens wide her casement,  
And throws white roses  
To her lover, the Earth —  
White roses — white roses —  
Gardens of white roses —  
But the boorish Earth,  
Shivers and grumbles:  
“It’s snowing again!”





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